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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000113

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AF/S FOR D. MOZENA, B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE, D. TEITELBAUM

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)
SUBJECT: MDC SECRETARY-GENERAL ON TSVANGIRAI TRIP, ELECTIONS

REF: (A) PRETORIA 223 (B) HARARE 83 (C) HARARE 2090
AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting with the Ambassador on January 18, MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube reported that MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai planned to lead an opposition delegation to Washington February 6-9. Ncube noted that ZANU-PF's internal turmoil was opening space for opposition election preparations and could provoke a backlash among resentful ruling party figures "bent on revenge." He asserted that the opposition's electoral success would depend on many factors over which it had little control, but as things stood now he expected the party to win 45-55 seats. He reported that a SADC delegation expected to visit Zimbabwe soon would include only lawyers evaluating the legal framework of elections, not more important election environment issues. END SUMMARY.

Tsvangirai Visit

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[12.](#) (C) According to Ncube, Tsvangirai, Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs Priscilla Misihairabwa-Mushonga and he planned to arrive in Washington on Sunday, February 6. They would seek meetings there with representatives from the Administration, civil society, and the Congress February 7-9, after which they would leave for meetings in Canada enroute to Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai also hoped to meet with UN SYG Annan in New York on his way to or from Washington. Ncube requested the Embassy's assistance in arranging meetings for the delegation with Administration officials. The MDC has sought assistance from NDI and IRI in making appointments with Congress.

Ruling Party Turmoil

[13.](#) (C) Ncube said the opposition was enjoying the spectacle of the intra-ZANU PF fight. More practically, the MDC was talking quietly to ruling party figures purged in the recent Tsholotsho debacle and primaries process (refs B and C). He

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believed these individual would have no real interest in joining forces with the MDC but out of vengeance might be induced to influence their supporters to stay away from the polls in order to demonstrate to ZANU-PF just how valuable they were to the party's fortunes. He noted that victims of recent developments included not just hard-liners and moderates seen to be deviating from the party line, but even some of the most loyal followers (e.g. NGO Bill architect and Minister of Social Welfare Paul Mangwana) who lost out in primary contests.

[14.](#) (C) Ncube said he was continuing his informal dialogue with Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Patrick Chinamasa on election and constitutional issues (they were to meet later that day on an unspecified agenda). However, Chinamasa had told him that he was resigned to playing very little role in the next Government. Chinimasa thought he might lose his ministry in a cabinet reshuffle before the elections and, if not, would certainly lose it after the elections. (Note: Chinamasa has retained his seat in the Central Committee but lost his slot in the Politburo and is not running for a parliamentary seat. End note.) Ncube said that if Chinamasa departed, Security Minister Nicholas Goche, who already had been involved in the confidential unofficial dialogue, would likely become his

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principal ZANU-PF interlocutor. Ncube added that he had heard current Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa might take Chinamasa's place in the cabinet.

Opposition Election Preparations

[15.](#) (C) In response to the Ambassador's question about Zimbabwe's election environment, Ncube said he was pleased

that "a lot of space" had opened up for the opposition while the ruling party was absorbed with its internecine combat. The tone and substance of official media reporting had improved, and Ncube joked that even he was reading the government-controlled Herald these days. Nonetheless, many of the usual constraints continued: authorities kept finding excuses not to approve meetings requested by the opposition in Chinhoyi, for example, and one MDC MP was threatened with arrest for letting a member of his audience speak without authorization at an otherwise authorized meeting. Moreover, the MDC fully expected conditions to worsen quickly when the dust settled in ZANU-PF and it turned its attention to the opposition again.

16. (C) Ncube reported that the opposition did not have the funds with which to conduct national primaries but that its candidate selection process was nearly complete. The party's organization down to the grassroots continued to improve, although a few local structures that had seen disagreement over selecting a candidate remained dysfunctional. Ncube made no prediction about when the party might lift its "conditional suspension of participation" in the parliamentary elections, but reported that the party's campaign was in an advanced stage of planning. The party was finalizing its communications strategy, which nonetheless would likely evolve to meet changing circumstances during the campaign.

17. (C) Ncube asserted that how the MDC fared in elections would depend on several factors beyond its control, e.g., access to the media, freedom of assembly, and police action against perpetrators of violence. The party's ability to overcome voter apathy and voter fears on voting day would be keys to maintaining seats in traditional MDC strongholds. To do so, it was organizing "voting clubs" to project safety in numbers, and would coordinate with authorities and observer groups to try to address circumstances at the local level. Ncube said estimates within the party for seats it will win if it participates range from 10 to 65 -- each extreme being unrealistic in his estimation. Reiterating the uncertainty of key variables, he said that he nonetheless expected the party to win 45-55 seats. (Note: The parliament has 150 seats, 120 of which will be contested and 30 of which are selected by the President. The MDC won 57 seats in 2000. ZANU-PF will need to win 70 seats to gain a two-thirds majority in parliament and amend the constitution at will. End note.)

South Africa/SADC Issues

18. (C) Regarding the ruling party/government espionage scandal, Ncube said the opposition had seen court documents that indicated the involvement of not only the South African agent in GOZ custody, but the director-general and assistant director-general of the South African National Security Service. Asked by the Ambassador about the ANC's recent public statement taking the GOZ to task on election conditions, its strongest to date (ref A), Ncube suggested that it indicated that the spy affair had not given the GOZ decisive leverage over the SAG.

19. (C) Ncube reported that the next SADC group to visit Zimbabwe on elections was not likely to be at a high-level. He said a group of SADC lawyers was scheduled to visit Zimbabwe this week to review the country's election-related legal infrastructure, but had been advised that the GOZ would only be prepared to receive them at an unspecified date next week. The group was not prepared to address the most important election environment issues, including media access, freedom of assembly, and political violence/intimidation.

Comment

10. (C) We urge that serious consideration be given to affording Mr. Tsvangirai access to the highest levels during his visit, including a possible meeting with the President. There are pros and cons for affording Tsvangirai such exposure. First, this is an opportunity for the Administration to underscore its commitment in Zimbabwe at the outset of President Bush's second term and soon after Dr. Rice's confirmation hearings in which she stressed our view of Zimbabwe as an "an outpost of tyranny." From his perspective, Tsvangirai has concluded that such meetings would do him more good than harm politically and we see no reason to second guess the conclusion of the man closest to the politics. The MDC President has been meeting African heads of state -- a rare honor for an opposition leader by culture and tradition on the continent. He also was received at the highest levels in Europe in December, including a meeting with Prime Minister Blair. Such a gesture in Washington will bolster Tsvangirai's stature with domestic and regional audiences.

11. (C) However, there are also potential downsides to such a high visibility visit. It could provoke a backlash within a ruling party that has been markedly moderating its posture toward the U.S. and the opposition. It might also play into the hands of GOZ propagandists in portraying the MDC as Western lackeys. From our perspective, the risks can be mitigated by public and private reiterations to the GOZ of our priority on the election process and the prospects for improved relations should the GOZ embark decisively on a path to advancing rule of law, human rights, and democracy. While there are good arguments to be made for and against an Oval Office meeting and a meeting with the Secretary, on balance we believe they would be constructive and recommend that the requests be given favorable consideration.

DELL